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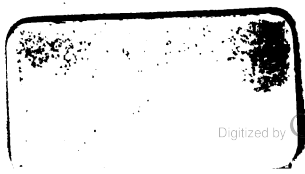
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THE SOCIABLE
THE ENTERTAINMENT
AND
THE BAZAR

PHILADELPHIA
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION
No. 1334 CHESTNUT STREET



**THE SOCIABLE
THE ENTERTAINMENT
AND
THE BAZAR**

A DISCUSSION OF CHURCH CUSTOMS

**BY THE
REV. ALFRED E. MYERS
PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF OWASCO, N. Y.**

**PHILADELPHIA
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION
NO. 1334 CHESTNUT STREET**



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PREFACE.

MANY churches have drifted into customs of which the full import is not apprehended. It is because I know my brethren love the church of our blessed Redeemer, and intend to serve him in all their ways, that I hopefully commend to them the thoughts of this little book.

The treatment of the Sociable refers to an organized condition of society. Frontier and mission churches may with advantage employ expedients which would be only injurious in the ordinary social conditions of our cities, towns and villages. The loving zeal which adopts the measures herein criticised needs no praise from me, but surely the question must have arisen in many minds: Are

these peculiar customs for the glory of Christ and for the good of his church? If the answer which I have given stimulates thought and calls out a better answer, I shall be content.

Owasco, N. Y., *March, 1882.*

I.
THE CHURCH SOCIABLE.

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THE CHURCH SOCIABLE.

THE last twenty years have witnessed a change in the construction and equipment of church-edifices significant of a change in the ideas of church-life. Parlor and kitchen, cook-stove and crockery, knives, forks and spoons, are now considered important parts of church furniture and outfit. In connection with the rearing of a church-edifice recently, architect, builder and carpenters, all in turn, asked what provision was being made for Sociables; and much surprise was manifested over the reply, that the church felt no need of Sociables, and required only accommodations for worship. Persons not yet old recall the time when such a question would not have been asked. But now the social development of the church, sometimes called "cultivating the social element," is regarded as a religious duty.

The church Sociable is intended to subserve the

interests of the church by making the congregation mutually acquainted, in order that they may work together and fulfill their obligations toward one another and toward the world. We are not prepared to say that social gatherings of a congregation might not be useful under some circumstances, if the religious purpose were kept steadily in view. But the great prominence given to this social life in our churches, and the light character of the diversions which nearly always arise out of it, indicate that the supremely religious character of the church is less vividly apprehended than formerly, and that the church is often regarded rather as a convenient medium of social intercourse and social pleasures than as an educator of the religious affections. The complaint of a checked growth and of a deficiency of accessions to membership comes along with the accounts of numberless social activities and merrymakings in the churches. The effort to expand and foster the social life of the congregation is often made an end, and the church is viewed as a social institution. It is deemed necessary, in order to weave the people together in society, to adjust each in an orbit to supply social pastimes.

A keen and thoughtful observer has lately written as follows: "The church is now for the most part a *depository of social rather than of religious influences*. Its chief force or vitality is no longer religious. . . . For a very large class . . . the church furnishes opportunity for a pleasant social life which is in no way different from the social life of amiable, intelligent people out of the church; that is, there is nothing distinctively religious about it." *

A brilliant contemporary novelist thus describes the state of religion in the town of "Equity:" "*Religion there had largely ceased to be a fact of spiritual experience, and the visible church flourished on condition of providing for the social needs of the community*. It was practically held that the salvation of one's soul must not be made too depressing, or the young people would have nothing to do with it. . . . The church embraced and included the world. It no longer frowned even upon social dancing—a transgression once so heinous in its eyes; it opened its doors to popular lectures, and encouraged secular music in its basements, where,

* *Certain Dangerous Tendencies of American Life*, Boston, 1880.

during the winter, oyster-suppers were given in aid of good objects." *

If in the words which we have italicized there be but a modicum of truth, Christians will view the state of things with deep concern. If the essayist and the novelist are not wholly in error, there is a tendency in our day which needs to be studied. We view the church Sociable not as an isolated fact or usage, but as an indication of a tendency.

It would be a sad error to allege that the church is not a social institution, and thence to infer that this social life is out of place. The church is above all things social. It is a society within society. But the church is a *religious society*. The bond of internal unity is religious sympathy. This one tie is essential to the peculiar social life of a church, and this alone. The church is as far from individualism as it is from mere society. The eremite and the churchman are of two different species of men. Whatever begets and nourishes religious sympathy favors the characteristic social life of the church. Whatever fails to strengthen this vital bond is apart from its purpose of existence. If any custom

* "A Modern Instance," W. D. Howells: *The Century Magazine*, vol. xxiii., p. 249.

obscures the real nature of the social life of the church, it does serious harm. The church differs from society not in being unsocial, but in the specific and ascertainable basis of its sociality.

Society is conditioned by many circumstances, such as kinship, race, political views, occupation, wealth, proximity, education. These contribute, with some subtler influences less easily traced, to the formation of taste, which is a sovereign arbiter in the social sphere. But religious sympathy is not limited by these influences. Christians, as such, have a taste for the companionship of Christians. They are divinely taught to love one another. This sympathy overleaps social barriers. Christians may heartily sympathize in their highest aims, and cordially share the sweetest and purest joys of church-companionship, though their social tastes are various. Social congeniality is not identical with religious sympathy, nor necessarily involved in it.

Although there may be subordinate principles of affiliation, the one principle of religious sympathy is enough to constitute a church. In the only place (with one exception) where our Lord uses the word church (*ecclesia*) he says that he is present with two or three who are assembled in his name. And

this is the only essential requisite of church-fellowship.

The church is not a bureau of society. It meets the religio-social needs of men. But men are not justified in demanding of the church an introduction into society, using that word in its ordinary sense. Disappointed seekers after social advancement often censure churches for not furnishing them with facilities which lie entirely outside of the province of the church. Social life arising out of church-relations ought to be merely incidental, and not included within the duty of the church or subjected to its supervision. Let the church make good men, and these will make good society. Let the church foster a holy family-life, and this will purify and elevate society. A living church counteracts the anti-social passions—pride, envy, malice, uncharitableness—which needlessly separate men, and promotes a truly human love and sympathy; and these are the cardinal principles of social cohesion. But the church is distinct from society. The church is not required to form specific social combinations or to take in hand the social relations of its congregation.

For the good of the church and of society the

social development of the church should be purely and powerfully religious. It is the family of God, the household of faith, the communion of saints. The more closely it may be compacted in this precious relationship, the more perfect its anticipation of the society of heaven, and the more potent its influence over society on earth.

The erroneous conception into which the church has to some extent insensibly lapsed occasions needless collision with existing social distinctions. The pastor of a church which carried out the "Sociable" idea consistently, said that all classes were included in his congregation, and glowingly depicted the free social commingling of the people in apartments under the church-roof as a desirable consummation, adding, "I don't doubt we drive away some prigs and upstarts by our democratic freedom, but we are glad to be rid of such. . . . Nothing can be worse for a church than a spirit of snobbery. . . . We have turned our backs flatly upon the chance to build a genteel and exclusive church." The claim of a happy social union of "all classes" is, we observe, immediately qualified by the statement that some prigs and upstarts are undoubtedly driven away. Thus we perceive that the very first effect

of founding a socially all-embracing church is to repel certain classes of people. By the terms of official praise the church thus lauded was exclusive, whether it was genteel or not.

This is the legitimate consequence of making of the church a society in the ordinary sense. It needlessly antagonizes social distinctions. For religious sympathy and friendship it matters not to us whether people speak incorrectly, are unlettered and unread or have strange manners, while for social life these things have great significance. The church needs not to stir these questions. Christian co-operation is independent of and superior to them.

The church, moreover, does not obliterate social distinctions by the Sociable.

For example, Mr. Acton, a successful merchant, has for his coachman a North-Irish Protestant, who, with his wife, is a member of the church in which his employer is an elder. From the pulpit notice is given of the Sociable, to be held at Mr. Acton's residence. As a friend of the church and a believer in the advantages of the Sociable, I advise John McIlravy to heed the minister's urgent invitation to all the members of the congregation: I say, "John, get out your best coat, and let the wife

don her fine frock, and the daughter likewise, and go with the rest. Do not hesitate at the threshold as if waiting for orders, but walk boldly in, shake the hand of the host and of the hostess, and take a seat. If the young ladies chance to be making charades, tell them your daughter Maggie can help them. If Mr. Acton's daughter is singing, let your Maggie go to the piano and turn the music for her, and offer to sing with her or after her. Your wife should try to be chatty and familiar with the ladies, for the minister said that all the church-people should be free and pleasant and sociable. If any of the people manifest surprise, John, it will only show their imperfect sanctification: that need not surprise, much less discourage, you."

Being a shrewd and sensible fellow, John will not heed my advice. Other members of the congregation, too, would not attend the Sociable. A quiet, faithful woman of bright piety, who makes a living from her little thread-and-needle shop, told me gently that she could hardly attend a social gathering in the name of the church at a house to which she would never be invited for her own sake.

Even when, instead of a private residence, the church-parlor or the Sunday-school room trans-

formed is the neutral ground for the gathering, the distinctions of social position are not forgotten. Wealth and poverty, education and illiteracy, and—the result of these and other influences—differing tastes, attract and repel. These distinctions and attractions and repulsions, instead of being submerged, rise into a conspicuousness which they would not possess but for the Sociable.

If not obliterated, social distinctions, thus needlessly encountered, react unfavorably on the church. In religious services and friendship, if at all on the earth, the rich and the poor meet together, and social inequalities and divergences vanish in the presence of the Maker of all.

An influential merchant visits an Irish stone-cutter who is a devout and sagacious student of the Bible, and these two men, widely separated in social position and tastes, greatly enjoy the interchange of thought and feeling on religious subjects. Any formal attempt to change this Christian friendship into social intercourse, to establish more intimate relations between the family of the merchant and the family of the laborer, would only hamper and hinder the existing friendship. In the church-parlor the dominant thought is not religious or reverential.

The customary tests of society are regnant. The laborer is not at home with the capitalist, nor the washerwoman at ease in a social relation with the lady who employs her. The poor and uneducated feel the incongruity of such a position. The wisest of them, at least, dread social contact with the wealthy and educated class, while these also find that religious sympathy does not imply social congeniality.

The system of Sociables thus produces an effect directly the opposite of that which is intended to be produced. It tends to make class-churches. It tends to drive away, or keep away, those who cannot breathe freely in the social atmosphere prevalent in any church. It not only repels those for whose taste or pretensions the social life is not sufficiently elegant and refined, but represses many of the poor and sorrowful for whom the social life is too elegant and too costly. The prevailing social character, which includes some, excludes others. Men ought not to be virtually debarred from the religious life of a church because the social life is to them uncongenial or unattainable. Religious equality is best secured by leaving quite out of sight these social questions, and cultivating that

religious sympathy which is the very life of God in the church. Then instead of wearying itself in a vain quest of popularity, and resting in chatty talk on earthly themes, and sinking to the level of common society-life, self-complacent because superficial, the church shall show that it means great things when with one voice it says, "I believe in the communion of saints."

The Sociable commonly merges into an entertainment, a merrymaking, a feast. Only a very intellectual company will be satisfied with conversation during a number of successive meetings. The strictly-defined Sociable is generally a dull affair. If amusements are shut out, it dies a natural death; if amusements are admitted, it lives a frivolous life, doing harm which we have elsewhere tried to describe. The Entertainment is the lawful offspring of the Sociable, and both show a loss of the apostolical simplicity of the church-idea.

The Sociable, with its feasts and merrymakings, serves to hide from many churches their spiritual barrenness. The dullness of a church is oppressive. Apathy, as opposed to sympathy, among the members has nearly reached the freezing-point. The Sociable is intended to warm and quicken and fuse

the congregation. But many churches are extremely active in social life, while the essential religious life is inert and unmoved. The Sociable not only does not essentially help the spiritual growth of the church, but by a factitious bustle and stir it diverts attention from spiritual deficiencies. The people will not heartily co-operate in work and worship; but because they do attend the Sociable the questionable inference is made that there is still much life in the organization. The right kind of life will manifest itself religiously and in fellowship on a religious basis.

In general, meetings for work and for worship ought to be enough for a church. If, with all attainable development of Christian friendship incidentally arising out of these, and with such social intercourse outside of the church-walls as will be cultivated by those whose hearts are one in conviction and faith and love, the members of a church are still mutually indifferent and unaffectionate, the trouble lies deeper than in a mere absence of sociability. Recourse must then be had to the Fountain of heavenly grace. The church may make slower progress which rejects these makeshifts, but its progress will be more genuine, and at least it will not

be prevented by a multitude of irrelevant engagements from a discovery of its spiritual dearth, nor turned aside from application to the highest and purest Source of supply. The friendships which are based on a common faith, hope and love, and formed in the exercises of Christian worship and Christian work, constitute the true fellowship of the church and the communion of saints. Let every church become far more loving and social than any church has ever yet been, realizing the tender ideal of the inspired apostle—one body, all sympathizing in the joys and sorrows of the humblest member. But let the foundation and superstructure be alike *religious*. The church does not need extraneous social supports. They hide her weakness; they add nothing to her strength.

II.
THE CHURCH ENTERTAINMENT.

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THE CHURCH ENTERTAINMENT.

THERE lies before us a printed programme which reads—

**“MUSICAL AND LITERARY ENTERTAINMENT
OF THE
YOUNG PEOPLE’S ASSOCIATION
CONNECTED WITH THE
——— CHURCH,**

In the LECTURE ROOM, ——— Avenue,

On Thursday Evening, February 22d, 18—.

Doors Open at Seven; Entertainment commences at Eight.

TICKETS, 25 CENTS.

NO RESERVED SEATS.”

The attractions offered are as follows :

Part First.—Two operatic selections on the piano; three ballads; one tragic reading; one comic reading; and a Xylophon solo.

Part Second.—An exhibition of a singing-ma-

chine; a slave camp-meeting song; an old-fashioned negro melody; and a semi-classical duet.

Part Third.—1. CHORUS—“*Whosoever Will;*”
2. QUARTETTE—“*Jesus, Lover of my Soul;*” 3.
SOLO AND CHORUS—“*Old Log Cabin in the Dell.*”

Accompanist, Mr. ——— ———.

The pastor figures as a reader of tragedy, solo-singer, and probably in association with other singers, although the names of the singers of the duets and quartettes are not given. The manager does not lose sight of the religious connection of the Entertainment. While Part First is wholly secular, Part Second includes the camp-meeting song, which doubtless was sacred to the poor slaves who formerly sang the wild and plaintive melody. As, however, it is sung in such a concert, and laid between the “singing-machine” above and two secular songs below, the religious impression is likely to be not too distinct. Part Third shows the religious element again more plainly—A “Gospel Song,” and Wesley’s immortal hymn, “Jesus, Lover of my Soul;” and, finally, lest the Entertainment should degenerate into a praise-meeting, and the audience should depart in too religious a frame of mind, a popular ballad closes the performance.

The programmes were scattered throughout the audience-room in which the congregation were holding their services during the rebuilding of their own edifice, and the minister drew the attention of the people to these documents and urged a full attendance.

Here is an editorial advertisement :

"The ——— Church Sociable will be held in the Church-Parlors on Wednesday, the 14th inst. Entertainment by the original Smith Family from Ohio. Also, reading and recitation. Supper from six to eight. Admission 10 cts. Supper 10 cts."

Another newspaper announcement :

"The Fourth ——— Church will give an entertainment of a dramatic character in Somerset Hall, Easter Monday evening. The title of the play is *Lumpaciuss Vagabundus* ; or, *The Three Tramps and the Jolly Clover-leaf*, or something to that effect."

Another editorial announcement :

"Something new in the line of church festivals will be the 'sugaring-off' in true backwoods style at the ——— Church this evening. The young ladies should be encouraged in their commendable efforts to furnish varied entertainments."

Another :

"Great preparations are being made by the Girls'

Missionary Society of the —— Church for their maple-sugar festival in the church lecture-room this evening. A band of gypsies will be present, and will serve hot from their witches' cauldron the delicious nectar."

Still another :

" BENEFIT OF ST. ANN'S.—On Wednesday evening of this week the operetta of *Little Red Riding-Hood* will be given in the Academy of Music for the benefit of St. Ann's Church. The Wolf in costume, solos, duets, trios, chorus of thirty voices, etc.

"On the same evening, under the same auspices,

H. M. S. Pinafore.

Sir Joseph Porter, K. C. B., Captain Corcoran, Ralph Rackstraw, Dick Deadeye, Little Buttercup, Cousin Hebe, Aunt Phœbe, and the Sisters, Cousins and Aunts, and the Sailors, all follow, with the names of the boys and girls—Ed. and Fred and Hiram and John and Bert and Ernest and two more Freds ; Marion and Stella, Mary and Janet, Nellie, Jennie, Sue and May, Grace, Florence and Louise. We are told that Ed. —— is from ——, and has sung the part (Sir Joseph Porter, K. C. B.) many times with great success. The sale of reserved seats opened at Brown's drug-store this morning, and several hundred were checked off in an incredibly short space of time. We hope St. Ann's will realize a substantial benefit."

Leaving the newspapers, a church which has recently received a number of young people into active membership is the scene of a humorous Entertainment. A stage is laid over the pulpit platform and over the place lately occupied by the communion-table, and there the young converts, with others, are encouraged to perform for the benefit of the church. At another Entertainment a group of young gentlemen go through the form of selling at auction a young lady to the highest bidder. At another of these diversions, before people of education and refined taste, a professional musician renders a roystering bacchanalian song with startling energy. Clergymen and their wives figure in costume as George Washington and Martha Washington. One minister reads humorous selections; another sings comic songs; others make droll speeches. The pulpit is sometimes removed, and Santa Claus and his chimney occupy the platform. Again, in just such a position, along with other attractions, we have an organ-grinder, with a wealthy middle-aged citizen sustaining the dignified rôle of the monkey passing the hat for pennies. The superintendent of a Sunday-school, chalked and painted, poses as an ancient king, and teachers amuse the audience with

a semblance of stage-embraces. Under the auspices of a Sunday-school a college glee-club provokes great merriment by its bold allusions to the truths which are taught in the school as tremendous verities. In the "Old Folks' Concert" solemn hymns and revered tunes are sung in a drawling style to raise a laugh.

Not long ago "Mrs. Jarley's Wax-Works" were announced for exhibition in the lecture-room of a prominent church. An excellent lady said to her sister when the evening arrived, "Let us go down: this Mrs. Jarley is, I presume, a missionary, and these wax-works are images of the heathen gods."—"But were you as ignorant as that?" interrupted a friend to whom she was relating the occurrence.—"Yes, if that is ignorance, I was as ignorant as that. And when I got there and saw that curtain stretched across, I was ashamed."

This sister had not been educated up to the new customs. The curtain rose on a company of masked performers, many of them members of the church. A worthy gentleman of remarkable sobriety of deportment and visage, and excellent in the prayer-meeting, played "the sneezer," and another Christian gentleman feigned intoxication, with 'his fair

and temperate face smeared with red blotches to assist the illusion.

All these things are done for the cause of Christ ! It does not avail to argue that many of these Entertainments are conducted, not directly by churches or their officers, but by young people's associations or the like. These societies are, informally at least, recognized by the church-officials. The church cannot get the benefit of these performances and avoid the responsibility for them.

Neither is the church Entertainment rendered harmless by being held in other places than the church-edifice. It is an added impropriety, at least, to hold these diversions in the church-edifice. Even those who have no high ecclesiastical views of the sanctity of the place may appreciate the force of association, and the consequent importance of preserving one place which suggests only hallowed thoughts.

To turn the house of prayer into a play-house, to sport and jest where we have brought our dead before burial, to secularize the home of our soul's family-life, to mingle jocular associations with the thronging memories which haunt that place,—we need no convocation of bishops to tell us that this

is unseemly. Every devout soul revolts from it as a dishallowing of most sacred things.

But our present concern is not with the Entertainment as held in the church-edifice, but as held under the auspices of the church as an organization.

Entertainments under church auspices ought not merely to be banished from edifices dedicated to God for worship or commonly used for divine service, but they ought to be utterly abolished. They are totally incompatible with the character and objects of the church as a religious institution. At the least severe estimate they are an impertinence. But, in fact, serious evils may be shown to arise from them.

The Entertainment exalts to prominence and control the lightest elements of the congregation. The more devout and spiritual, the natural guides and leaders of the religious exercises and benevolent activities of the church, seldom have the taste, even if they have the capacity, to act as masters of ceremonies and stage-managers. We freely admit that no form of government or method of administration has ever entirely excluded unworthy leaders from the church. An avaricious traitor may bear the purse; a heaven-daring hypocrite may try to

deceive the Deity with pretence of consecration ; and this in spite of the simplicity of ordinances and unworldliness of customs of the infant Church. Bad men use the church as a ladder for their ambition, notwithstanding its religious aims and occupations. But when the church stoops to folly, an unsuitable class of persons takes the lead, not in spite of, but by reason of, the direction of its energies. A less devout, and in part openly worldly, element of the congregation is suddenly at the front, and leading the church—whither?

At this point we observe that while some churches unwisely keep the young people too much in the background, the prevailing tendency is toward pushing them too much to the front ; and this not only in devotional and evangelistic activities (in which they ought to be early trained), but especially in amusements. The impression obtains that religion, for itself, is not palatable to the young, and the questionable inference is drawn that the church must bountifully sweeten the proffered cup with pleasures of inferior origin. It is sometimes said that the youth will certainly turn away from the church which presents no festive attractions. So the churches vie with one another and with secular in-

stitutions in the advertisement of amusements. It is natural that the young, responding to this bribe, should assume the management of church-pastimes. Thus, some churches are hurried onward in an unfortunate career under the leadership of those who in their non-age had better be learning the primary lessons of Christian living. The Entertainment does not favor a happy equilibrium of moral forces in the church.

If this regimen is bad for the church, it is equally bad for the young. Our Christian maidens, at other times tenderly sheltered, are often placed on exhibition at church Entertainments with a publicity which shocks their own sentiment of delicacy, but they make the sacrifice uncomplainingly for the benefit of a sacred cause. The children are shown off with less pain, but even more real injury. Little creatures who can hardly talk plainly are exposed to the glare of the footlights, and are allowed to taste the charmed draught of applause. They become actors and actresses.

The spirit of the time fosters the growth of a race of premature little men and women who seem to have skipped over the gladsome period of boyhood and girlhood. They are young men before

they have been boys, and young ladies with an impatient spurning of girlhood. Instead of retarding this overhasty process, many churches help to rob the children of that inimitable grace and that dewy freshness which belong to childhood, by transporting them from the nursery to the stage.

Church Entertainments, moreover, occasion heart-burnings. The more worldly we make the church, the more scope and incitement do we offer for worldly ambitions. It is indeed quite possible to indulge selfish passions while the thoughts are ostensibly dwelling on religious themes. But Christian truth and worship are a perpetual rebuke to sins even of this subtler sort. In the lighter occupations of life, however, ambition, with its attendants, envy, strife, heartburning, is spontaneous. Excursions into the realm of pastime reduce the church to the level of every-day passions. Secularized by these irrelevant engagements, and led in them by a light-minded class of persons, many churches are distracted by jealousies and strifes which would have been largely avoided if they had attended simply and diligently to their work of instruction, worship and beneficence.

These amusements also detract from the dignity

and honor of the church. A church cannot enter upon this path without a humiliating surrender of dignity. As a spiritual institution the church has a mighty claim on the reverence of mankind. While it prosecutes its warfare with spiritual weapons it compels respect and receives much unexpressed homage. But thoughtful men regret the spectacle of a church turning aside from its holy work for sport and jest and holiday-making.

Not only in general is the dignity of the church impaired, but in several particular relations and aspects. There is often, for example, a sad sacrifice of dignity in the ministry. The clergyman at the church Entertainment is in a trying position. If he knows how "to show an antick disposition," he is put under strong pressure to do so. A merry speech, a humorous reading or recitation, a comic song, an exhibition of himself in costume, is in order. Some clergymen are neither too constrained nor too free, but many are in a strait between a self-conscious stiffness due to a sense of danger to their professional (or pastoral) dignity, and a relaxation of manner which savors of cap and bells. A few touch both of these extremes in one short evening.

If the pastor is too serious, his presence is a

restraint, and his departure is the signal for the heightening of the sport. If he is as merry and demonstrative as the gayest, the unthinking applaud, and the graver sort try to comfort themselves by saying, "What an influence he has with the young people!"

"How is a minister to act in these Sociables? He is expected to be somewhat festive. I generally feel as graceful as an elephant," said a pastor in a company of his clerical brethren. And the general smile of response and remarks following showed that a number of clergymen well versed in society had felt the absurdity of the situation.

Superintendents and teachers of Sunday-schools also sacrifice much of the respect of their scholars on such occasions. The children and youth might see the same persons indulging in proper mirth in social connections without losing respect for them. But merrymaking which may be allowed in society is out of place in the church. When those who teach that the Sunday-school is organized for an unspeakably high and serious end convene the school merely for fun and sport, and then use fantastic devices to entertain the scholars, the reverence of the young for their instructors is in jeop-

ardy. When, moreover, it comes to be believed among the boys and girls who are sought out for Sunday-schools that there is a rivalry among the various schools, one trying to outdo another in the number and attractiveness of Entertainments, their respect for the workers in these schools is perhaps more seriously diminished than it ought to be, for they are capable of little reflection, and do not discern the zealous kindness which adopts these extravagant measures in order to win them. Many little fellows treat these attractions as the rival advertisements of business-firms, and invest their valuable time where it will bring them the largest returns in fun, amusement and refreshments.

So, instead of preserving in the church (including the Sunday-school) a heavenly dignity and a noble range of associations, we impair its dignity and lessen the reverence of society for its ministry and officers (and often too for its house of worship) by these misplaced diversions.

Entertainments, moreover, distract the minds of the people from religious thought. Under the most favorable circumstances our minds recoil from the tension of severe thought on religious themes. It is difficult even to secure attention. Passions are

turbulent and clamorous; cares are thronging; the eye is a vagrant; the ear itches for novelties. Religious thought, alas! is not always implied in attendance on divine service. But we need deep spiritual impressions to preserve the necessary employments and relations of life from unmitigated worldliness and godlessness. Whither shall we turn to rest our souls from the inevitable distractions of toil and care and pleasure if the church presents just such hints and plans of pleasure-making as we thought to have left behind us? There is only one institution which has the single aim of concentrating human thought on divine themes. In reverence for the Founder of the Church, as well as in pity for humanity, let this one institution do this one thing. We can find our recreations and diversions elsewhere.

It would seem that the church must be holding slackly the most serious and pungent of the doctrines of Christ when it can remit holy meditation and doff the armor of spiritual conflict merely for sport and merrymaking. Such phenomena as we have considered could hardly arise in churches full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. And if church levity comes from a dim and wavering persuasion

of the veracity of the Church creeds, indulgence in levity will surely becloud spiritual discernment and relax the fibres of the soul. Themselves the symptoms of declining faith, these unseemly diversions will cause faith to decline yet more rapidly. The human mind naturally flows in the direction of the least resistance. Serious reflections and works of piety become the more distasteful by contrast with these lighter activities.

If these church Entertainments even served as the substitutes for festivities and amusements of secular origin, thus guarding the youth of the church from contamination, they would be more justifiable. But they have the contrary effect. By exalting amusement, by enduing it with a factitious importance, the church allows its youth to give too large a space in their scheme of life to an element which ought to be strictly subordinate. There is a graduation from the church drama to the better-appointed and better-acted drama of the theatre, and from the somewhat tame evening Entertainment in the church-parlor to the ball which is not held in the interest of a church.

It is impracticable for a church thus distracted from religious thought to work with holy zeal for

the advancement of the kingdom of Christ. No church can serve two masters. When a church enters upon a round of Entertainments, the occasions which suggest them are many and various. There is a festival for each season of the year and for specific products of the confectioner's art. They are for winter and summer, for old and young, for benevolence and for fun. Hardly is one of these past, and the remains of food or litter or stage-appointments removed from sight, before another is under consideration. The time and energies which are given to the church in this way are not available for better objects; and, worse still, the two rival lines of effort within the church are morally incompatible. The parasite takes the life of the oak. The effort for amusement dries the fountains of genuine religious zeal and activity.

It is claimed that Entertainments draw men to the church. But such a method of drawing is an infection of the church by "chromo civilization." It is a holding out of inducements which are not germane to the origin and aim of the church. Is it indeed true that the church cannot draw men by the preaching of the gospel, by works of mercy and by the exhibition of a Christ-like character? If

such were the case, these cheap devices would not long delay its downfall. But the church Entertainment gives the enemies of Christianity too convenient a weapon of offence. Even if Entertainments would continue to draw men in large numbers into a nominal association with the church, the church, secularized and degraded, could not greatly benefit the throngs who should respond to the offer of amusement. The basis of respect would be lacking in an institution which had so forgotten its high vocation.

III.
THE CHURCH BAZAR.

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IN the old Roman drama a plot which had become hopelessly involved was solved by the sudden appearance of a deity on the stage, who rescued from despair both the author and his hero. This part is taken in the financial embarrassments of modern church-life by the Bazar or Fair.

Whatever a church does in trade or speculation—whether the merchandise be dry goods or groceries, bric-à-brac or refreshments, musical and dramatic entertainments or what not—we include under the name of the Bazar.

The transactions of many church Bazars have been a scandal to Christendom. Presuming that our readers would not countenance these flagrant abuses, or desire to see gambling legitimated in church Fairs, we consider the Bazar in its simple forms and with reference to its universal features.

The Bazar is often projected in a sincere love for the church, for missions or for the poor. Christian women especially undergo great toil and make very considerable sacrifices in this kind of enterprise. We heartily honor them, while we deprecate the facts which suggest such labors, the deficiencies which seem to demand them and the spirit which accepts them. We should regret if any word of ours seemed to cast a slight on the motives and intentions of the promoters of church Fairs. Yet, however well intended and however purged from gambling and other abuses, we hold that the Bazar, as such, is an unreasonable and hurtful measure. It ought to be utterly supplanted by an older, simpler and purer method of beneficence.

The Bazar is an illogical attempt to unite business and benevolence. There is in it an element of unreality. It is either sham trade or sham charity. If it is real trade, it is sham charity; if real charity, sham trade. In so far as it is a genuine market, it offers a just equivalent for money expended. This offer is an appeal to self-interest. The typical act of business is an exchange with a profit for both parties. It is an act involving by its nature neither benevolence nor malevolence,

but only a lawful self-love. The trading instinct is appealed to by the trading church. On the other hand, disinterestedness is the essence of charitable giving. Business and charity are as different as self-interest and disinterestedness. Business offers an earthly equivalent for our money; charity bids us give, hoping for nothing in return. The one summons us to give, the other to spend. The one offers a market value, palpable and immediate. The other points to remuneration beyond the horizon of this life. Every man is free to reject an offer of trade if he perceives no advantage likely to accrue to himself, but the claims of benevolence no one is at liberty to reject, however disconnected with his own advantages. As a market the Bazar appeals to self-interest. Its argument addressed to the public is that a dollar has as great purchasing power at the Bazar as at any shop dealing in the same kinds of wares. Unless it sinks below the level of honorable business, it gives to customers the worth of their money.

This commercial offer undeniably removes the transaction from the realm of benevolence to that of self-love. Just in proportion to the real and honorable character of the Bazar as a market, it

tends to degrade the benevolence of the public to the level of self-interest. It shows men how they can give without sacrifice, while the sacrifice is the very essence of giving. It renders practicable the service of love and self-interest at once. But the offer of equivalents for so-called charitable outlays empties the liberality of the customer of its charity. The two elements rise and fall alternately. Why call it charity to purchase at a church Fair a piano, a watch, an umbrella or a supper at the current market price?

The business-invitation of the Bazar, accepted in the spirit of its announcement, belongs to the sphere of commercial transactions, and the more consistent its mercantile character the more completely is it alienated from the spirit of benevolence. There is charity in the unselfish labors of those who hold the Bazar, and who give the profits to a good cause, but this mercantile presentation of their cause does not make the public partakers of their benevolence. It excuses the public from self-sacrifice. It does not invite them to do good, but only to purchase from those who are willing to do good with the profits. In the relation of the people at large to the object of benevolent effort the Bazar is

therefore, so far as it is a genuine market, a sham charity.

If it is claimed that money is thus obtained for religious uses from many persons who would not really *give*, we readily admit the fact. A large amount of money in this way reaches church-treasuries from people who care nothing for the church as such, and who would not make any sacrifice for its benefit. Great congratulations are held over this money, as if it were a clear gain to the treasury and the way of getting it an outwitting of Satan. Selfish and worldly men are made to be charitable in spite of themselves. But with this class it is a matter of business. There is no benevolence on their part. They receive an equivalent. Their nearest approach to charity is in a good-natured compliance with the solicitation of those who sell the goods. If they are not repaid for their expenditure in things more tangible, they are repaid in fun and frolic. If the amount of money procured be the standard of success, then at first sight the Bazar looks like a short cut to prosperity. But consider what has been done for the selfish Christian or easy-going worldly man. The sacred name of religion has been invoked, the needs and

claims of the Church of God have been presented, and then the man has been shown how he could satisfy these claims without earthly sacrifice. Thus, so far as the inducements and advantages peculiar to business are presented and appreciated, the Bazar is a sham, a counterfeit of charity.

But there is an alternative. The Bazar is not strictly a market. The public is not solicited to trade at the Bazar merely on mercantile principles. The object is always named in the advertisements. The appeal for patronage is directed to the benevolence of the public. This is the other horn of the dilemma. In so far as the Bazar appeals to the public as a charity its claim to be a market is a false pretence, and the name of trading is only a pretext for the solicitation of alms. The request of a merchant that men shall trade with him for any other purpose than to obtain a fair value for their money is outside of the realm of business. Whether he asks to be patronized because he is a deserving character, or because he gives the profits of his business to the poor, or because he is poor and has many dependent on him, his petition steps over the boundary of trade and proceeds from another basis. It is an asking of a favor or an alms.

Self-interest is enough to move the public to trade; pity stirs many to benevolence. But men will never, on any large scale, trade with particular dealers as a form of charity. In a reluctant way very kind and benevolent men sometimes trade with one or another merchant for the good of the merchant, to help him along. But when the bargains cease to be satisfactory they say, "It is what I had reason to expect." No man can afford to do important business on this principle. The poor man has a right to ask for alms, but to ask his wealthy neighbor to put the alms into the guise of a mercantile transaction is to use business as a cloak for charity. Even the rich have some reserved rights, and one of these is to call charity by its proper name and to do business on business principles.

We cannot buy shoes out of charity to a dealer unless he has shoes to fit our feet and at a price within our means. If his wares are both reasonable in price and suited to our wants, we need no appeal to our charity to induce us to deal with him.

It is, moreover, a feature of the divine system of political economy that those who most uniformly give men the equivalents of their money draw the public to them. If it were not so, trade would be

impossible. The undertone of the appeal of the Bazar is, "Buy of me for Christ's sake." The words "For the benefit of ——" are intended to lay hold of the conscience and affection of benevolent persons, and induce them to patronize the Bazar for the sake of the good which it attempts to do. This introduces the eleemosynary motive to the detriment of the mercantile soundness of the Bazar.

If the church is to engage in business at all, it ought to set an example of genuine and high-minded dealings. On the contrary, the business of the Bazar is regarded as a farce by its most truly generous patrons, and all its customers pretend so to regard it, and take much credit to themselves for charity in dealing at its counters. The patron who responds to the words "For the benefit of ——" is prepared to spend a certain sum for the advancement of the cause, and does not want to carry home anything of value to represent his expenditure. He is only playing at trade while really doing a deed of charity. In proportion as it is a real charity it is a sham trade. How much better to trade when we trade, without trying to get the credit of benevolence; and when we give.

to give without asking to have boot of dry goods or refreshments! Such a transaction gratifies neither one's trading instinct nor his benevolent aspirations. It is neither good business nor good charity.

The prices asked at church Fairs have been proverbial. A species of extortion is practised. The patron (not customer—that word implies real business) is commonly expected to buy for piety's sake articles which he does not want, and to pay for them more than they are worth. It would be absurd for him to complain of the rates. "Did he come here to do real business?" would be the surprised thought of every one. The farcical nature of the business is recognized by all. The church people who fix the prices are not dishonest or extortionate. They get no personal benefit from any profits, however great. The explanation of the scale of prices is that the element of charity makes the Bazar a parody on trade. So the buyer, whether benevolent or only ashamed to refuse any demand enforced in the name of a sacred cause, shrugs his shoulders as he and his money are parted, saying, "I know it is an imposition, but it is for a good cause;" and the sweet smiles of the gentle dealers silence reason and disarm logic

until he almost believes this strange travesty of trade to be a form of beneficence.

When a poorly-clad woman on the street asks you to pay her a half-dime for a pencil worth only one cent at a stationer's, you perceive an asking of alms in the ostensible overture to trade. Real business is transacted on the basis of market values. This street-vender is satisfied when you give her the price of a pencil or less and let her keep her goods. Bazar trading is of this sort.

Mr. John Smith of the city of ——— finds at his front door on a winter evening two small boys shivering in the keen air. They offer for sale tickets to a concert in behalf of a church in a distant part of the city. Bidding the tremulous urchins in out of the cold, Mr. Smith glances at the tickets. He does not want them :

“Boys, I do not care for any of these; I shall not be able to use them if I buy them.”

“But, sir, please buy some, just to help us along.”

Mr. Smith good-naturedly goes through the form of a purchase, which is not a real purchase; he “makes believe” buy, but he receives nothing of value for his money.

If the concert be given under the auspices of the church which the worthy citizen attends, ten tickets are sent to him by mail. The committee apportions the tax (perhaps five dollars) to him, veiled under the guise of a bargain. If he should return the tickets with the message that he does not wish to attend the concert, he would be considered very simple to have imagined that any real bargain was intended, or more probably very churlish thus to evade his assessment. If he does not want the tickets, he may burn them. This is benevolence under the guise of business. It is an unworthy sort of begging, because it pretends to be trading. It is an absurd way of levying a tax, for a show is made of an equivalent which may be worthless. The victim does not have the option which is an element in all traffic, nor the satisfaction of having made a free gift; and the so-called equivalent debars him from feeling that he has made any sacrifice, although the sacrifice may be considerable.

The falseness of the Bazar as business is further seen in its relations with regular merchants. The way of obtaining much of the merchandise, and the rate at which quantities are sold, alike show that the

Bazar is only a sham market. The Bazar imposes forced loans on merchants, and then injures their business by competition. For example, Mr. Shylock is a merchant who employs many clerks, both male and female. He treats them as machines. He brushes aside the weak and unfortunate without remorse or pity. This gentleman has been known to manifest a lively interest in the welfare of orphans. Mrs. Lordly and Miss Gentle call on Mr. Shylock in his busy store, and say, "We are interested in the Fair on behalf of the —— Orphan Asylum. We wish to get some goods to make up, and some articles to sell."—"Certainly, ladies; step this way. Here is a piece of muslin which I shall be happy to give, with ten dollars' worth of toys. And whatever you purchase will be charged to you at cost."

Again, Mr. Ezra Cohen, an Israelite, with equal politeness contributes liberally of his merchandise in aid of the Bazar held for the purpose of freeing a Christian church from debt.

When Mrs. Plutus, in queenly apparel, calls on the prosperous dry-goods merchant, Mr. Michael Mullahy, and confides to him the project of the Ladies' Sewing Society of the —— Church to

send a box of comfortable clothing to a home-missionary, the tradesman, although a devoted son of the Infallible Church, graciously grants subsidies to a Protestant clergyman.

What has softened Mr. Shylock's heart toward the orphans? Nothing. If it were a hospital for cats in which a large circle of actual and prospective customers were interested, this heart of flint would be just as soft toward the dear quadrupeds as it is now toward the fatherless children. Mr. Cohen has not changed his views regarding Christianity, nor is Mr. Mullahy wavering in his fealty to the Roman Pontiff. The ladies have been obtaining forced loans from these tradesmen—in each instance compelling a merchant to make a considerable pecuniary sacrifice for a cause which he hates, or for which at the best he cares nothing. In each case the merchant gives because he is afraid to refuse. He knows that a denial would make an enemy of his applicant. If her petition had been denied, Mrs. Lordly would have gone out from Mr. Shylock's store indignant. No one of her friends but would have heard of this merchant's obdurate insensibility to the claims of the orphans. The keen trading instinct of his race did not forsake Mr. Cohen. Mr. Mullahy, as he

charges the amount of his contribution on his "profit and loss" account, regards the temporary loss as a necessary evil to be endured with a view to future gains—as an investment, not for the heavenly rewards which crown true charity, but for the earthly profits which enrich shrewd merchants.

Recently, a distinguished lady called at the warehouse of a sewing-machine company and requested that several machines be entrusted for sale to the Fair of a famous church. The saleswoman was a subordinate, governed by strict regulations which were imposed by the company. Offering several machines at the lowest discount permitted by her employers, she stipulated that a small rental should be payable on any of the machines remaining unsold at the close of the Bazar. The lady expressed much indignation at this condition. The saleswoman stood on her instructions.

The distinguished lady said, "I am constantly writing for prominent journals about all things which ladies use. I can influence the sale of large numbers of machines. The ——— and ——— companies let me have their machines rent free, and I intend to recommend them in my writings. But if you do not let me have your machines

on the same terms, not one good word shall I say for them."

The saleswoman replied that as the company was already pressed to meet the demands upon its manufacturing capacities, she presumed that such an omission would not be fatal; and the lady withdrew in anger.

Some merchants of course give from an unfeigned interest in the cause for which the Bazar is held. But there are many others who give far more than they would give if there were no constraint; many who give to institutions which have no direct claim on them; some who give for the encouragement of churches or charitable institutions which they neither love nor approve nor respect. The tax may be heavy, but as a matter of expediency it must be borne without murmuring.

When the managers of the Bazar have got their goods from the merchants for nothing or at very low prices, they further injure the business of their kind (and politic) contributors by an absurd competition. The Bazar is not limited by market values, because it has not paid market prices for its stock and its labor. Although Fairs often charge extortionate prices, yet they may with facility sell their

wares at absurdly low rates. This is often done, especially toward the close of the Bazar. As far as it goes, this is a most unbusiness-like competition with the shops which deal in the same kinds of merchandise. It is bad enough to exact contributions from merchants, but it is an aggravation of the injury when the Bazar, unhampered by any regard for market rates, runs amuck among prices, to the detriment of all regular business. The Bazar generally runs a short race. Yet brief as is the career of each one, the number of them (especially in the cities) is so great that we may readily believe that merchants are not always thrown into an ecstasy of delight at the sight of a purchasing (?) committee of a prospective Fair entering their establishments.

So the Bazar uses arguments irrelevant to trade, charges fluctuating prices which alternately oppress buyers and regular business-firms, obtains some merchandise by a tacit compulsion, and, in so far as the element of charity prevails, it is a sham business. There is enough business conducted with unreal show in our day. The church needs not to join that company; even sacred colors flying do not make genuine that which is hollow and unreal.

The Bazar is a compromise, a descent from principle to expediency, and from a clearly-revealed divine method to an ingenious but harmful human device. Without doubt, it is easier for the selfish and thoughtless crowd to be benevolent without benevolence, to be charitable without charity, to be devout without devotion, to give without giving, to make costless sacrifices, to be paid for doing good. The educational influence of the Bazar is bad. It trains men not to charity, but to a refined and specious selfishness dignified with a beautiful name. What effect this usage will have upon the rising generation it is not hard to divine.

It may with justice be urged that women and children, who are generally reckoned as non-producers, are through Bazars enabled to co-operate in earning money for good works. But the evils of the system far outweigh this advantage. The gifts of willing hearts will be accepted according to their ability. In the long run, even the amount of money raised by the church will be greater on the simple scriptural plan than in any other way.

In strong contrast with this curious device is the holy simplicity of the Christian method of supporting churches, missions and charities—namely, by free

and unrequited giving, in view of the value of the ends to be attained and of the wisdom of the means used, and in hope of a heavenly recompense. The heart loving Christ and finding him in the church and in the poor, makes a joy of sacrifice. The offer of a mercantile equivalent for its gift is a severe reflection on its disinterestedness. Even before the Life and Light of men stood in human flesh among us the Hebrew was not only tutored by tithes and requisitions, but inspired to the free-will offering. That was the glory of the older system. And under the brighter shining of the Christian age this voluntary giving alone is perpetuated.

God has ordained that the progress of his kingdom shall depend largely on the liberality of his people—not, certainly, because he needs our gifts, but in order that the church may be blessed in giving, and in order that the outward and visible expansion of the church may not surpass the growth of the Christ-like grace of self-sacrificing love. The claims of the church and of the poor are not to be lowered. These causes are worthy of our sacrifices. The holy work of charity is to dispel human misery by evoking human compassion.

"It is twice blessed ;

It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes ;"

but the giver often has the greater blessing. Christian giving is at once an evidence and a means of grace. We cannot improve upon God's method. We cannot at the same time serve God and mammon. "True charity can never be made one thing with self-indulgence, or turned into a thrifty traffic. As soon as we are ready to welcome the principle of sacrifice as the Saviour has revealed it, bringing the due proportion of all we have to his service, these dubious resorts of a half-faithless policy will disappear, and the kingdom will come with power."*

** Pastoral Letter of the House of Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 1877.*

